

Low fingers

The easiest finger action comes when the fingers ‘hover’ above the strings, ready to fall directly on to their notes. Lifting and dropping the finger then uses far less energy than when it moves several centimetres above and/or away from the string. A suitable analogy might be of vertical take-off planes, or helicopters, which hover above the landing-pad before landing, as opposed to ordinary aircraft which approach the runway from afar.

The faster the passage the nearer the fingers stay to the strings. For example, as the finger pattern in Ex. 1 gets faster the fingers must remain lower and lower:

1

Example



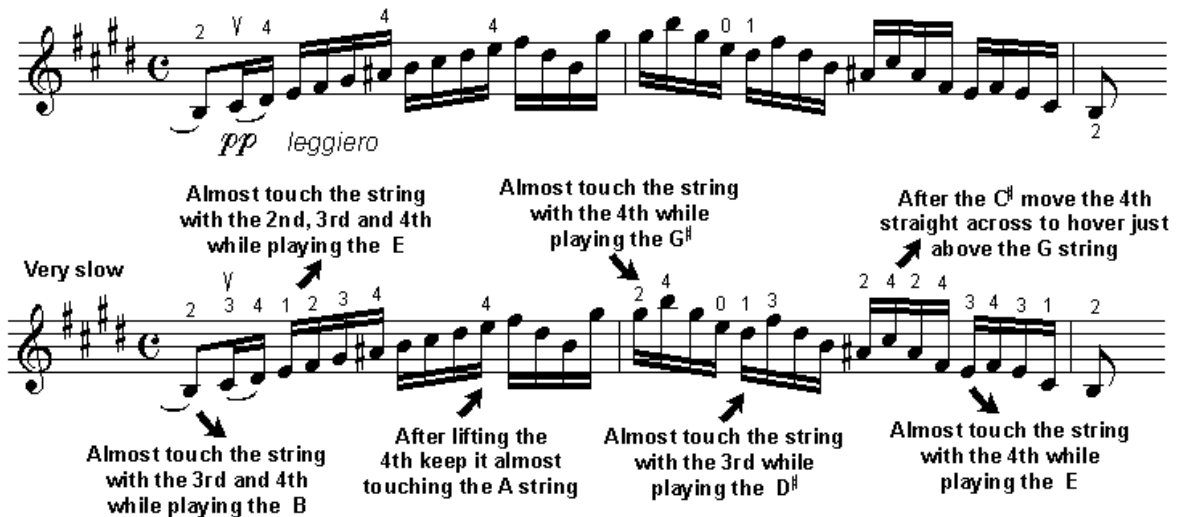
Keeping the fingers extra-low

- Practising by exaggeration, play fast passages with fingers so low that they hardly clear the strings at all when they lift. This should cause many impurities in the tone, but afterwards lifting the fingers only a little further will seem very easy and natural.

Violin Concerto in E minor, op. 64, Mendelssohn
Third movement

2

Example

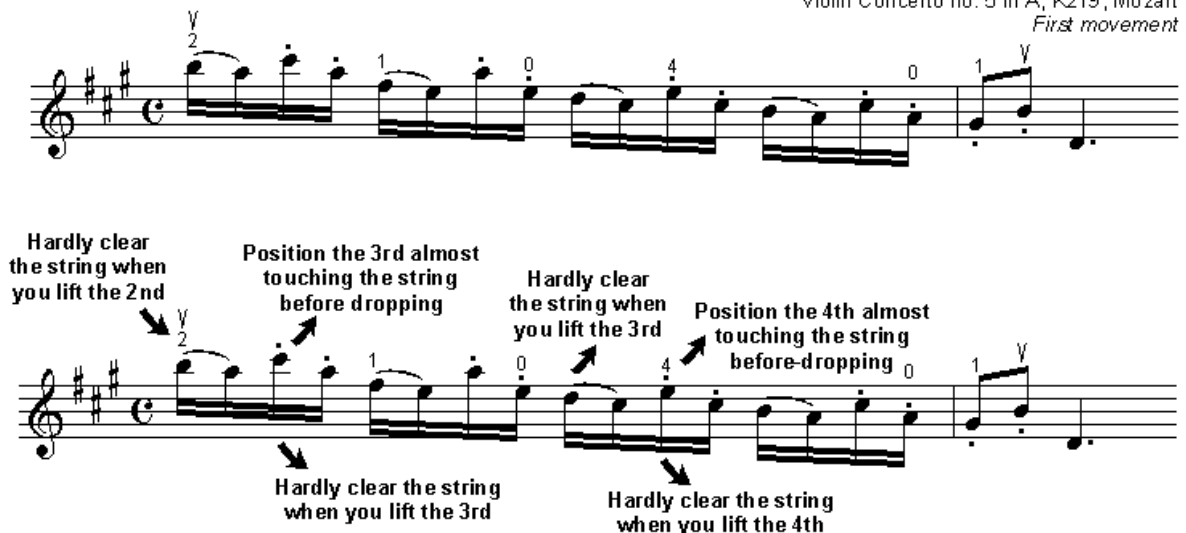


- Begin at a slow tempo with very low fingers. Gradually increase the tempo without lifting any higher.

Violin Concerto no. 5 in A, K219, Mozart
First movement

3

Example



Holding down the fourth finger

Depending on the shape of the phrase, it is sometimes possible to hold the fourth finger down on an adjacent string while playing the other fingers. This may feel awkward, and you may have to play slowly, but holding down the fourth finger stops the others from lifting too far from the string. Afterwards, playing without holding down the fourth finger, keeping the fingers close to the string will feel much easier.

Playing on the E string, hold the fourth down on the A. On the G string, hold the fourth down on the D. On the middle strings, you can hold the fourth finger down on an upper or lower string.

Scène de Ballet, op. 100, DeBériot
Tempo di Bolero

Musical notation for Example 4, showing a sequence of double stops and single notes with the fourth finger held down on an adjacent string. The notation includes fingerings (2, 6, 6, 6, 2, 6, 0, 2) and a dynamic marking *f*.

4

Example

- Play double stops, or hold the fourth finger down silently and play only the upper line:

Musical notation for Example 4, showing the same sequence as above but with the fourth finger held down on an adjacent string. The notation includes fingerings (2, 6, 6, 6, 2, 6, 0, 2) and a dynamic marking *f*.

Arpeggios: low fingers after a shift

When changing position the fingers may all-too-easily move too far away from the string, especially in high positions. Keep the fingers close to the string before, during and after the shift.

- During the shift arrange the fingers into their correct spacing. Arrive on the shifted-to note with the fingers hovering ready above their notes.

Violin Concerto in A minor, op. 9, Rode
First movement

Musical notation for Example 5, showing arpeggios with shifts and fingerings. Includes annotations for "Long pause" and "Slow shift, arriving on the B in the same shape as (1)". The notation includes fingerings (1, 3, 4, 1, 1, 3, 4) and a dynamic marking *f*.

5

Example

- (1) Pause on the first finger B (marked '+'). During the pause, arrange the third and fourth fingers so that they are just above the string over their respective notes.

Do the same while pausing on the D# ('++'). Positioning the third and fourth just above the string, aim 'low' with the third finger to avoid it being pulled up too high by the following extended fourth finger.

- (2) Pause on the note before the shift. Shift slowly to the B or D#, changing the shape of the fingers during the shift so that you arrive in the same shape as (1).

Next month's BASICS looks at how to shift to harmonics